

BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Town Council Meeting
Held on Monday 27th April 2026 at 7:00pm in the Corn Exchange

DRAFT
Subject to confirmation

PRESENT

Cllr H Miéville – Chairman of Council
Cllr S Hitchings
Cllr R Holmes
Cllr S Chapman
Cllr A Cross
Cllr T Clarkson

Cllr C Stevens – Vice Chairman of Council
Cllr L Hitchings
Cllr N Lacey-Clarke
Cllr B Quayle
Cllr Y Miéville
Cllr M Putt

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk
Claire Commons

Operations Manager

IN ATTENDANCE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Nicci Brown

180. PUBLIC SESSION

The Chairman introduced Claire Commons to the meeting as the new Town Clerk, who starts on Friday 1st May 2026.

The Chairman led the council in a minute's silence to remember Freeman and Past Mayor, Peter Warrington.

181. REPORT FROM DORSET COUNCIL COUNCILLORS

Cllr Quayle informed Councillors there is Dorset Council funding opening to organisations working with young people. Applications will be accepted for the next four weeks.

Cllr Quayle said he and Cllr Lacey-Clarke are receiving numerous emails about the bypass work with people saying they are not aware of the planning application.

They are also receiving a lot of contact about the Dorset Council council tax.

The fire service consultation closes on Friday 15th May 2026 and, although it doesn't impact Blandford Forum, it does impact across the county.

Age Friendly Dorset is an important initiative at Dorset Council and people can get in touch with them to find out more.

The Local Plan will be discussed over the coming months.

Local residents have been raising issues about utility companies due to roadworks around the town.

Cllr Holmes asked about Fairfield Bungalows and Cllr Quayle said there is a two year waiting list for double yellow lines. Cllr Lacey-Clarke advised Councillors to report areas as much as possible because this adds weight to requests.

182. APOLOGIES

Cllr S Morgan
Cllr J Robinson

Cllr M Spruce
Cllr G Del-Pinto

183. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

Agenda Item No. 13 – Cllr Quayle advised he will leave the room as he is a Trustee. Cllr Lacey-Clarke also said he is no longer linked with the charity and would therefore remain in the room but abstain from voting.

Agenda Item No. 17.1 – Cllrs Putt and Chapman declared an interest because of their involvement in a local group.

184. MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30th MARCH 2026

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED.

185. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE

The paper was noted (see Appendix A).

The First Wedding in the Town Hall! – On Friday 3rd April (Good Friday) we held the first civil ceremony in the Town Hall for a local couple with 24 hours' notice. Dorset Registrars and members of staff rallied around to organise this on a bank holiday which the family were very thankful for.

Payments for Weddings – We are currently treating them like normal bookings so we are taking a deposit for them. This means they could have booked a wedding during the 2025/26 financial year for August 2027 and only pay a very small deposit and next year will pay for the balance (if they don't cancel due to the small deposit) at the 2025/26 rate which was in place when they booked it. As other Town Councils charge up front with no refunds, staff think we should take the more affordable £200 for a Town Hall ceremony up front too or the £800 for the entire venue. We would of course be happy to hold a date for a month or so if it is in advance to give people a chance to wait for pay day or find the money. Therefore, if couples want to book ahead and benefit from current prices they need to be prepared to pay for it at the time of booking. Councillors were emailed for their views on this. Since then, the office staff have confirmed that all but one wedding has been paid in full and the outstanding one is being approached to pay the balance.

Events Update – The Frankie's Guys tribute night sold out and was a great success with positive feedback. Over £400 was taken on the bar and they have been booked for 2027! The Countess of Sandwich will join us Friday evening for a talk in the Town Hall and Dick Taylor has been booked for 30th May 2026. Please let the office know if you can think of any other speakers we can approach as these events are very popular. Thanks to the Councillors who have attended the events we have put on to boost the use of the Corn Exchange since we reopened in November!

Redundant Equipment – Two contractors have kindly advised on pricing redundant Wi-Fi and AV equipment (since the refurbishment) and the Town Clerk has sold a TP Link and Access Point bundle for £30 and an Allen & Heath QU-PAC for £800. There is one outstanding item that will hopefully sell in the next week.

Free Parking Days – Dorset Council has approved the following free parking days for 2026/2027; Saturday 11th July 2026, Monday 31st August 2026, Sunday 8th November 2026, Saturday 28th November 2026 and Saturday 5th December 2026 (Small Business Saturday). This leaves one date left to use.

Charter 400 Mosaic – The Town Clerk approached Hall & Woodhouse and the Chairman responded to advise that, after careful consideration, they cannot allocate resources away from other local good causes to help with.

Fridge – The Town Clerk attended a meeting with volunteers and Cllr Stevens last week and they presented her with a bouquet of flowers, card and gift.

185. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE (cont.)

Insurance – Council delegated authority to officers to confirm the insurance provider in consultation with some Councillors and the total amount is £24,532.97 for the commercial combined policy, £2,461.76 motor insurance, £644.51 Personal Accident. Regarding the cancellation of the existing policy covering the Corn Exchange Premises, a formal Cancellation Endorsement effective from the 19th April 2026 has been received totalling £1,948.91, inclusive of 12% insurance premium tax.

Flood Risk Management – Dorset Council's Engineer for Flood Risk Management has been in touch to arrange a site meeting for 22nd April 2026 and some Councillors will be in attendance and it is hoped they will report back to this meeting.

Plant-based Solutions – A local resident has emailed Councillors to ask them to support stronger plant-based food policies. The resident has therefore been invited to attend one of our online climate working group meetings and a response is awaited.

Town Clerks – This is the last council meeting for the outgoing Town Clerk, Linda Scott-Giles whose last day is 30th April 2026, although she will of course be summoning Councillors to the annual meeting with the agenda going out w/c 27th April 2026. She has had handover days with the incoming Town Clerk, Claire Commons who starts on 1st May 2026.

St George's Day – The Town Clerk added that very positive feedback has been received from the public about the service that was added last minute, but was well-attended.

186. CIVIC REPORT

The paper was sent to Councillors via email (see Appendix B).

187. RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECEIPT OF MINUTES

None

188. TO APPROVE EXPENDITURE FOR PAST MAYOR BADGES

The paper was noted (see Appendix C).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED (11 in favour, 1 abstention) that

The Town Council approves expenditure of £136.66 each for 15 Past Mayor badges with one offered to each Past Mayor. Should a Past Mayor have already received a badge and been Mayor more than once but wish to have another one, they must purchase it themselves. The badges will therefore only be offered to new Past Mayors (Expenditure Authority: General Power of Competence, Localism Act 2011, S1-8).

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

189. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED PUMP TRACK

The paper was noted (see Appendix D).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Quayle and AGREED unanimously that

The Town Council notes the report and agrees the following actions:

- **Seek confirmation of use of land from the Dorset Council.**
- **Reapply to the Dorset Council Capital Leverage Fund in the next round.**

189. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED PUMP TRACK (cont.)

- Seek other potential funding streams (Sovereign Network Group, Sport England, Blandford St Mary Parish Council.)
- Obtain planning permission.
- Go out to tender.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

190. TO RESOLVE TO SIGN THE TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES FOR PHASES 3A, 3B AND 3C OF THE PERSIMMON HOMES DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVE EXPENDITURE AUTHORITY FOR THE PLAY AREAS

The paper was noted (see Appendix E).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously that

The Town Council authorises the Chairman of Council, Vice Chairman of Council and the Town Clerk to sign and seal the transfer document for Phases 3a, 3b and 3c and return it to the solicitor.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

191. TO DISCUSS FORMING A WORKING GROUP TO RESPOND TO DORSET COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON WARD BOUNDARIES

The paper was noted (see Appendix F).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr H Miéville, SECONDED by Cllr L Hitchings and AGREED (7 in favour, 3 abstentions, 2 against) that

The Town Council forms a working group to consider the consultation on ward boundaries.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

Cllr Quayle left the meeting.

192. TO CONSIDER A GRANT APPLICATION FROM NOCS

The paper was noted (see Appendix G).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (10 in favour, 1 abstention, 1 non-vote) that

The Town Council asks for a Business Plan incorporating a new income and expenditure to be submitted and that a representative attends the next appropriate meeting.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

193. TO REVIEW THE UPDATED STRATEGIC PLAN (NOW INCLUDING THE PUMP TRACK AND STAFF REVIEW)

The paper was noted (see Appendix H).

Cllr Quayle returned to the meeting.

194. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE AND CONSIDER ANY REQUESTS FROM THE:

- 194.1 Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group – The next meeting is being held on 28th April 2026.

194. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE AND CONSIDER ANY REQUESTS FROM THE: (cont.)

194.2 BFTC Commemoration Group

A brief discussion was held on the anniversary of the Great Fire of 1731.

Cllr Lacey-Clarke left the meeting.

194.3 Climate Change & Biodiversity

This month's meeting was postponed until next month.

194.4 Dorset Council Grant to support the Market Area Enhancement Project

194.4.1 To agree recommendations from the Market Area Enhancement working group regarding a draft plan for the proposed area

The paper was noted (see Appendix I).

Cllr Lacey-Clarke returned to the meeting.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr L Hitchings but NOT AGREED (4 in favour, 8 against) that the Town Council thanks the working group for the excellent work and we hold off from responding to Dorset Council until we have a correct, considered response on the storage/management/staffing issues.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Stevens, SECONDED by Cllr S Hitchings and AGREED (8 in favour, 3 against, 1 abstention) that

The Town Council submits the brief to Dorset Council and confirms that management and storage issues will be resolved. The Town Clerk will work with staff to ensure this is covered and the logistics with vehicles will be assisted with removable bollards.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

195. REPORTS FROM COMMUNITY AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Cllr Cross provided an update on the twinning visit with guests from Mortain visiting Blandford Forum over the weekend of Mayor Making from 14th to 17th May 2026.

196. CONFIDENTIAL

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED unanimously that

The incoming Town Clerk can remain in the meeting.

196.1 To consider nominations to present certificates to members of the community

The paper was noted (see Appendix J).

Nomination A – It was PROPOSED by Cllr Chapman, SECONDED by Cllr Putt and AGREED unanimously that

The Town Council awards the nominee with a Certificate of Appreciation.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

196. CONFIDENTIAL (cont.)

Nomination B – It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously that

The Town Council awards the nominee with a Certificate of Appreciation.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

Cllr Y Miéville left the room.

Nomination C – It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (8 in favour, 1 against, 3 non-votes) that

The Town Council awards the nominee with a Certificate of Appreciation (specifically mentioning two individuals as well as the organisation).

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

Cllr Y Miéville returned to the room.

Nomination D – It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (11 in favour, 1 abstention) that

The Town Council does not award the nomination on this occasion because it does not meet the criteria.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

196.2 To receive the survey of the Marsh & Ham toilet block and consider next steps (sent to Councillors separately)

The paper was noted (see Appendix K).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Putt and AGREED (8 in favour, 3 against, 1 abstention) that

The Town Council does not proceed with the Community Asset Transfer at this time but will continue to maintain the units to a safe standard and will pursue alternative systems. It will bring the future use of the building to a public meeting in due course.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

The meeting closed at 9:12pm.

SIGNED

DATED